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WASHINGTON -- Returning to power for the first time in 12 years, House Democrats on Thursday elected Nancy Pelosi as the first woman speaker and moved swiftly to adopt rules to rein in the influence of lobbyists.

Pelosi, also the first Californian to lead the House, and new Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., put President Bush on notice that they intend to press for a new policy on .

"The election of 2006 was a call to change -- not merely to change the control of Congress, but for a new direction for our country," Pelosi said. "Nowhere were the American people more clear about the need for a new direction than in the war in ."

Leaders of both parties pledged to promote a spirit of bipartisanship. But a partisan fight broke out in the House within hours as Republicans complained about how the Democrats pushed through new ethics rules.

The rules for the first time will ban lobbyist-paid gifts and meals, and prohibit House members from flying on corporate jets. The Senate is expected to take up its own new ethics rules next week.

Pelosi's election as the first female speaker generated the most excitement on the opening day of the 110th Congress, with lawmakers bringing children and grandchildren to the chamber to witness history. Pelosi, who brought her six grandchildren, was elected on a party-line vote of 233-202 in a roll call that featured some brief, flowery tributes from Democratic colleagues who took note of the milestone.

"It's an historic moment for the Congress. It's an historic moment for the women of ," said Pelosi, who is now second in the line of succession to the president, behind the vice president. "It is a moment for which we have waited over 200 years."

The shift in power was apparent in the faces of House members. Democrats were all smiles, while Republicans appeared glum.

But Republicans joined Democrats in recognizing Pelosi's feat.

"Whether you're a Republican, a Democrat or an independent, today is a cause for celebration," said House GOP leader John Boehner of Ohio , who offered the traditional introduction before handing the gavel to Pelosi.

After swearing in the representatives, including 55 new members, House Democrats turned to ethics reform, an issue they chose to highlight after a spate of scandals in the GOP-controlled Congress contributed to their majorities in the House and Senate.

"Today, the new Democratic majority is fulfilling the pledge we made to the voters," said Rep. James McGovern, D-Mass. "We're going to clean up Washington ."

Among those speaking in support of the measure was newly elected Rep. Zack Space, an Ohio Democrat who succeeded ethically tainted Republican Rep. Robert Ney. "I don't think it's too much to say my very presence before you constitutes a message to this body," he said.

Republicans objected that Democrats were muscling through the rules without giving the minority an opportunity to shape the legislation, a complaint that Democrats often made when Republicans were in power.

Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., called the majority's refusal to consider Republican amendments a "poor start" for the new Congress.

"The thing that troubles me most is the fact that this was done in a unilateral way," griped Rep. David Dreier, R-Calif.

In the end, however, Republicans joined Democrats in a 430-1 vote to support the new rules, with only Rep. Dan Burton, R-Ind., opposed.

Common Cause, an ethics watchdog, called the new rules a "step in the right direction," but said it hopes Congress will create an independent ethics commission to enforce the rules. Democratic leaders have pledged to study the idea.

The new rules also prohibit representatives from bullying lobbying firms to hire employees of their party affiliation. The rule is a reaction to the so-called K Street Project, an initiative of former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, which sought to pressure lobbying firms to hire Republicans and contribute to GOP candidates.

The House's new Democratic majority is scheduled today to take another step toward fulfilling an election-year pledge: voting on a new rule aimed at ending the secrecy around the controversial practice of allowing lawmakers to earmark funds for their pet projects.

Another new rule, expected to be adopted today, would prohibit votes from being held open to give leaders time to round up votes -- a response to the 2003 vote on the Medicare prescription drug benefit when House Republican leaders extended the vote, which usually runs about 15 minutes, for three hours while GOP leaders twisted arms.

The rules changes are part of the ambitious agenda that House Democrats have pledged to pass in the first 100 legislative hours.

Next week, they plan to pass bills to increase the minimum wage, implement the Sept. 11 commission's recommendations, ease restrictions on federal funding for stem cell research and authorize negotiations for lower drug prices under Medicare.

In the Senate, Democrats who hold a tenuous 51-49 majority sought to promote bipartisan goodwill but also set an ambitious agenda, including immigration reform and expanded stem cell research, and issued a warning that they expect the administration to make significant changes in .

Unlike the House, however, the Senate did not start work on legislation. In a festive atmosphere reminiscent of first-day-of-school excitement, Vice

President Dick Cheney swore in 33 senators, including 10 new ones.

Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson of South Dakota remained in the hospital less than three miles from the Capitol, recovering from brain surgery, underscoring the fragility of the Democrats' Senate majority.

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